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THE BASIC SPIRITUAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE RELIGION OF THE CHIANG.*

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In my research work among the Chiang tribesmen in the N. W. of Szechwan I early came to the conclusions; (1) that they came originally from somewhere in Asia Minor, and (2) that their Old-Testament pattern of religion represented an early patriarchal type, known to the Hebrews before their settlement in the holy land, and followed by them more or less after arrival there. To this opinion we still mainly adhere. Though much more has been learnt in recent years about their customs and ritual nothing has come to light to change this view in any radical sense.

It is known that they speak a language allied to that of the Tibetans, Chiarong and Nosu. The presumption is that they are of one stock. But, nevertheless, they have certain racial characteristics of their own. They are finer in physique and frequently show Semitic features of countenance which these races fail to do. Many of their customs, too, indicate a closer affinity to those of the Hebrews. Even if it be asserted that the Tibetans and Chiarong came also from the West—which we believe—yet, because of these facts, caution is needed before sweepingly including them in the same racial stock as these three races. The Chiang is a sort of a Jew among our West China peoples. You can scarcely hide him even when his blood has been mingled with a strain of Chinese. He has a way with him, an appearance and a religious outlook that marks him out from others around him.

We admit we have been criticised for doubting the classification. But the language test does not always hold. There are many races talking English to-day who cannot be called Anglo-Saxon. Did the Chiang always speak the language they do to-day? He would be bold who asserted they did without sufficient proof of the same. The suspicion is strong that they did not. To-day, as we hear more of their wonderful religion this suspicion may grow stronger than ever.

What then is the nature of the Chiang religion? It is simply that of the olden-time worship in the high-places. We know that this was followed by the nations of Canaan and after their day by

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186 Chinese and freely intermarry with them. In many villages only
[197] Chinese is now spoken, and only a few of the oldest people understand the Ch'iang language. The Government has opened primary schools where the Chinese language and culture are taught, and in Wei Chow there is a normal school which the brightest Ch'iang students are encouraged to attend. The writer is much pleased at the improvement in the attitude and relations of the Ch'iang towards the Chinese and of the Chinese towards the Ch'iang.

II. Introduction.

193 I. History. The first references to the Ch'iang people are on the oracle bones. They lived to the west of the Shang dynasty Chinese who made war upon them, took them captives and even offered them as sacrifices to the ancestors of the Shang people. On the oracle bones the upper part of the word meaning Ch'iang is the horns of a sheep or goat, and the lower part is man 人, meaning people who raise sheep or goats.[1] The Chinese word for Ch'iang today consists of the character for sheep or goats above, and below is the character for man 人. A small third character is sometimes
[231] added 羌, and this character is sometimes abbrevited to a dot. An interesting fact is that while the Ch'iang are all farmers, they depend for a livelihood very much on their flocks of sheep and goats.

174 There is ample evidence to show that the Ch'iang united with the Chou people in the war that resulted in the overthrow of the Shang dynasty.[2] Later there were wars with the Chinese, and at least some of the Ch'iang migrated westward and to the southwest. At this point let us quote the tradition of the Ch'iang. The writer first heard it from Kou P'in-shan 苟聘三, who mentioned a year and a half as the time of the migration. He has heard it from several Ch'iang people and took it down in this form from Mr. Ch'en Chen-shu, who lives above the village of K'a Gu.

I. Creel, Herrlee Glessner The Birth of China, 1936, p. 213.

II. Li Fan T'in Chih, Book Four, History of the Border Section 2.
理番廳志 卷四 邊防志二
Shih Chi, Book Four, Chou Ben Chi, Part Four.
史記四 周本紀第四
Chung Kuo Min Ch'u Shih, Chapter II, The Ch'iang Race.
中國民族史 第十一章 羌族
Creel, Herrlee Glessner, The Birth of China, 1936, p. 215-6
Legge, James, D. D., The Chinese Classics, Vol. III., Part II., The Book of History, pp. 391-2

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Far away there were once two nations, *Tzu La* and *Gu La*. There was a war between them, and as a result *Gu La* (the Ch'iang people) was defeated, and the Ch'iang migrated travelling a year and several months before they reached the place where they now live. On the way they crossed a river, using round boats made of cow-skins. A boat leaked, and the sacred books got wet. While the books were being dried on the shore some goats came and ate them. Therefore there are no written sacred books, and their contents are handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. 174

When the Ch'iang reached West China, the Chinese and the Jung 戎 were at war. The Jung were defeated and retired to Tsagulow. The Chinese retired to Kuanhsien leaving the territory in between vacant, so the Ch'iang came in and occupied it. At that time the Ch'iang herded sheep and goats and raised wheat, but not corn. Later under Ch'ien-lung (A. D. 1737-1795) the Wa Ssu came from Wu Ssu Tsang in Tibet and helped the Chinese in a war that lasted twelve years. There was a great battle at Wei Kuan (維關), where a person can go from the top of the mountain to the river without being seen by the enemy. The Ch'iang were defeated, and the Wa Ssu were given the territory they now occupy, between the Ch'iang and the Chinese.

There is probably both history and tradition in this legend. Since there are several tribes in Burma that have the tradition of a lost book, we can assume that this part of the story is legendary.

2. The Country.

The Ch'iang, at least that part of the Ch'iang people that we are studying, inhabit a region along the T'o and the Min Rivers, approximately between the 31st and 32nd degrees longitude and the 103rd and 104th degrees latitude, from T'ieh Ch'i 鐵溪 on the north to So Ch'iao which is twenty li down the Min River from Wen Ch'uan and from points east of Mou Chow and Wei Chow to about twenty li up the river from Li Fan. Formerly they extended southward as far as Yueh Hsi and northward into Kansu and Shansi. The rivers and valleys are very narrow, and the mountainsides generally very steep. The main cities are Wen Ch'uan, Wei Chow, Li Fan, and Mou Chow. The rivers are from four to seven thousand feet above sea level. The surrounding mountains rise in some places to an altitude of sixteen or seventeen thousand feet. The 131 133

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the village. If anybody does so, serious calamities may result. Near Ts'a To the writer was told that once two strangers entered the village a day or two after the sacrifice had been performed, with the result that during that year many of the domestic animals died. 796 778

7. Sacred Groves.

Every village has a sacred grove. Its trees, which are generally oaks, are sacred and must not be cut down. In it are from one to three trees that are especially sacred and near these is an altar capped with a sacred white stone. In front of this altar the sacrificial animal is killed. In or near the sacred grove is generally a small temple made of stones and plastered together with clay. There are no images in it, but in one corner is a sacred white stone.

There is a procession led by the priest and the master of ceremonies followed by men and boys from all the homes in the village. They first go to temple where the priest chants, beats his drum, and now and then dances. Then they march to the altar near the most sacred trees, where the animal is sacrificed and offered to the gods. Then they return to the temple where the meat is cooked and divided, and the flesh is eaten. A large cake of unleavened wheat bread is offered with the goat.

Most of the ceremony is performed at night and very early in the morning. The sky and the stars above, the trees and shrubs below, the darkness and the silence, the sacred trees and the altar with its sacred white stone, give an atmosphere of awe and wonder so that the worshipper believes that he meets his gods and feels their very presence. The worshipper experiences the emotional thrill that is realized through the belief that he has had actual communion with his gods.

In recent years some of the sacred trees have been cut down and used, some by Chinese soldiers, and others by the Ch'iang themselves.

8. The Tradition of Hebrew Origin.

Before the establishing of the Chinese Republic neither Chinese, foreigners, nor Ch'iang had any idea that the Ch'iang were Hebrews. It was approximately 1915 when Rev. Thomas Torrance began to work among the Ch'iang people. He sincerely loved them, and tried to help them by teaching them the Christian religion, by opening schools (which he was prevented from doing), and by giving them good bulls, cockerels, etc. One of his early converts, and the most 174 114

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[174] important among them, was Kou P'in-shan, called Issac Whitehead in Mr. Torrance's book, "The First Missionaries To China." Mr. Torrance became interested in the customs of the Ch'iang, and especially in their religion. He believed that he saw physical resemblances between the Ch'iang and the Hebrews, and also that there were close resemblances in their social and religious customs. Mr. Kou was also interested, and at Mr. Torrance's suggestion he travelled among the Ch'iang looking for parallels. Both Mr. Torrance and Mr. Kou became convinced that the Ch'iang were Hebrews. Mr. Kou wrote a short pamphlet in which he expressed some of his veiws, and Mr. Torrance later wrote his book, "The First Missionaries To China," in which he elaborately states his belief and his proofs. The research of Mr. Torrance and of Mr. Kou P'in-shan became subjective rather than objective, a seeking for facts to prove a theory, and Mr. Torrance's book is the finest example that the writer has ever seen of the results of subjective research in the interpretation of the life and customs of a somewhat primitive people. Facts have seemed to fit into theories when they really do not, resemblances have been exaggerated, and differences overlooked. The Ch'iang are a likeable people with some good characteristics and Mr. Torrance is to be commended for his sympathy and love for them, but that they are Hebrews is most unlikely, and the key to an understanding of their psychology, life, customs, and religion is a knowledge of the psychology of primitive people.

The following facts are worthy of note:—

[176] 1. The Ch'iang are not monotheists. In most localities they have at least seventeen gods that are considered to be Ch'iang, and it is certain that there is no place where there is not at least five. It is likely that the seventeen gods are known and worshipped all over the Ch'iang region. This does not include numerous Chinese gods that are worshipped almost everywhere.

[144] 2. There is not a single physical characteristic that would convince a physical anthropologist that they are Hebrews.

[771] 3. Their sacred ceremonies are not primarily for the forgiveness of sins, as is asserted in "The First Missionaries to China," although that is included.

[177] 4. The sacred cane shown opposite page 98 in "The First Missionaries To China," is a Mt. Omei pilgrim's walking-stick with the dragon head knocked off. Nowhere else in West China are such

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walking-sticks made, and every Ch'iang to which the writer has shown the picture has stated that he has seen nothing like it in the Ch'iang region. Snakes on canes used by the priests are very rare among the Ch'iang and are much more crudely carved. When a snake does occur it is with the idea that the snake makes the stick more efficient in exorcising demons.

5. The Ch'iang tradition is that the migration to western Szechwan took one year and several months, not three years and six months as is affirmed on page 19 of "The First Missionaries to China." Even Kou P'in-shan stated to the writer that it was one year and several months.

6. The flat roofed houses, the high watch-towers, the stone buildings, the sacred white stones and many other culture traits are common among tribespeople all over the highlands of western Szechwan, Si K'ang and eastern Tibet, and may have been acquired by the Ch'iang after they arrived in Szechwan. The sky god is very similar to the god T'ien worshipped by the Chous who were the allies of the Ch'iang in B. C. 1121.

Let us assume for a moment that the Ch'iang are Hebrews. How amazing it is that neither the Ch'iang nor the Chinese knew anything about it, and that the Ch'iang have no taboo against eating pork.

VI. *Conclusion.*

This article is a preliminary statement that needs criticism, correction, and amplification. They will be welcomed by the writer, as well as additional information.

The Ch'iang people are changing rapidly. There are villages in which it is almost impossible to find any person that can speak the Ch'iang language and who understands their customs. The great variation in language and mores in different localities, and the natural reticence of the people make it extremely difficult to understand and to interpret accurately the life and ideals of these people.

They came to this country many centuries ago, apparently from the northeast, and settled in this mountainous, semi-arid land where it has been difficult to wrest a livelihood from nature, and where powerful enemies have made war on them. Their neighbors, excepting the Chinese, are in the Tibetan culture area, and through them numerous culture traits have penetrated into the Ch'iang region. They have had constant cultural contacts with the Chinese through